AN EMERGING VIEW *of* LEARNING CONTENT

- CHARLES JENNINGS

Content is a major factor that underpins learning and development. After all, learning is little more than changing behaviors. However, the role and relative value of learning content is changing fast and learning professionals need to respond if they are to maximize its use.

The two main drivers for this change are the increasingly dynamic nature of content and the relative failure of the knowledge transfer approach to learning and development.

CONTENT IS DYNAMIC

The first and foremost driver for a change in approach to learning content is the phenomenal growth and increasing dynamic nature of most of the data and information we encounter.

In the time it takes many content-rich training courses to be developed and delivered, the underlying content is quite likely to have changed. Just keeping up with these changes creates a major challenge for training and learning professionals and will likely lead to a continual cycle of revisions. The old models of training and learning based on a relatively static body of content no longer apply. Learning professionals need to adopt new ways to integrate dynamic content into their work.

THE FAILURE OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

A second driver for a new use of content is the jettisoning of the idea that training is primarily about knowledge transfer. It is not. Training is primarily about "enabling to do."

Closing this knowing-doing gap is the major challenge for learning professionals, according to Stanford academics Jeff Pfeffer and Bob Sutton. It doesn't matter how much content we package up and deliver as part of our courses and resources, or how much people can demonstrate what they know, it is the ability to turn that knowledge into action that creates the real value for our people and our organization. Pfeffer and Sutton point out that the so-called knowledge advantage is actually a fallacy and that many companies know too much and do too little.

> **THE ROLE AND RELATIVE VALUE OF LEARNING CONTENT IS CHANGING FAST.**

AN ALTERNATIVE: THE FIND-ACCESS APPROACH TO LEARNING CONTENT

The Find-Access Learning Model, developed by David James Clarke IV and I, is an approach to help move mindsets and actions away from relying on "learning through knowing" and to focus on supporting "learning through doing."

The find-access approach to content addresses the challenge of evolving from content-centric "know what" learning to experience-rich "know how" learning. It redefines learning content to focus on where it has the greatest impact.

The approach defines three basic types of information: core, contextual and task-specific. It then maps the most appropriate way to deal with each type. In some cases, we simply have to learn and memorize content. In others, we need to familiarize ourselves and know where to find it when needed. (See Table 1.)

The find-access model helps rethink the role of content in our learning and development activities. It also builds greater focus on content as a resource to be accessed at the point-of-need and on the power of tools, such as the simple checklist.

No matter what model is used there is an inevitable move away from the old content-rich, experience-poor approach and toward new learning approaches that are focused on enhancing and amplifying experiences and content-find models. ⟳

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TABLE 1.

Information Types	Traditional Learning Model	Find-Access Learning Model
Core Concepts needed for basic understanding and operation	Memorize and learn	Memorize and learn
Contextual Information needed to implement action	Memorize and learn	Familiarize and access
Task-Specific Information needed to complete task	Memorize and learn	Find when needed

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